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(54) Induction melting.

(57) Induction melting apparatus has induction coils (14) operated by agitation and melting power supply circuits (16,18) for input of melting power at a first frequency for induction heating at preselected temperature and agitation power at another frequency for inducing turbulence in the melt, the melting pow-

er supply including series resonant means (38) through which the melting power is applied to the coils at the first frequency at the same time as the agitation power is applied, the circuits including facility for regulation of the melting and agitation independently of each other.

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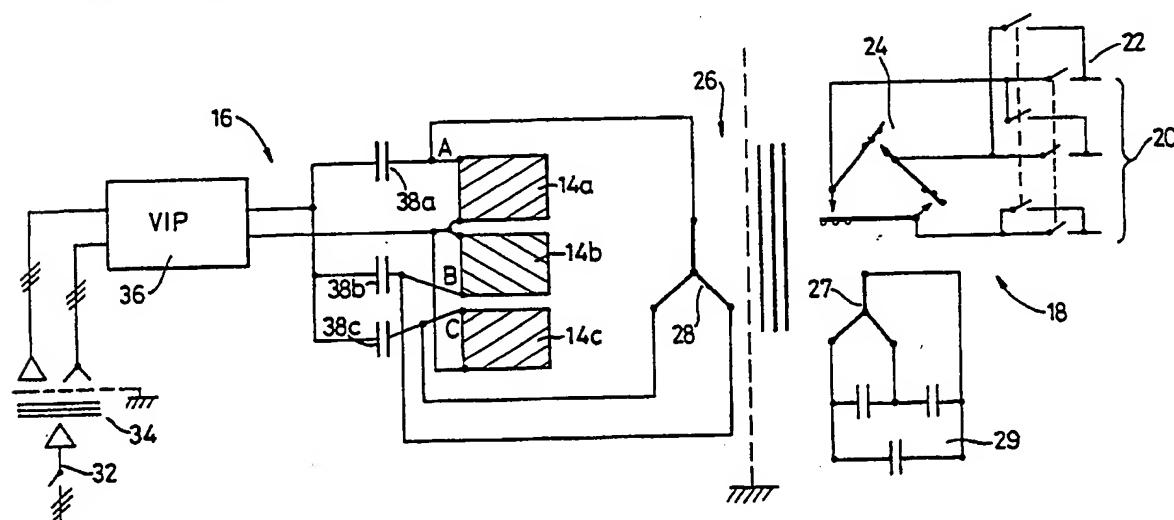


Fig. 1

This invention relates to induction melting.

It is often desirable in induction melting, particularly but not exclusively the melting of steels and other alloys at high temperature in vacuum, to hold the molten bath at a constant preselected temperature and, at the same time, to provide stirring by causing turbulence or agitation of the melt to a required degree to ensure a homogeneous mixture as in the manufacture of alloys. The need is to provide adequate agitation to ensure speedy and efficient mixing without excessive heating of the melt so that the predetermined holding temperature is not exceeded.

One method and apparatus providing operation in the above manner is described and claimed in our co-pending British patent application 8703488 Serial No. 2200979 dated 14th February 1987.

The object of the present invention is to provide apparatus for induction melting which is particularly effective in operation, which can readily be adapted to heavy duty (high power input) or lighter duty (lower power input) applications and which is reliable and readily controlled in operation.

According to the invention there is provided induction melting apparatus including a vessel for holding a melt of molten metal, induction coil means operatively associated with the vessel, and power supply means for providing power input to the induction coil means, said input having a component at a first preselected frequency for operatively holding the melt at a preselected temperature by induction heating and a component at a second preselected and different frequency for agitation of the melt by inducing turbulence therein; the power supply means comprising an agitation power supply circuit operatively supplying current to the coil means at said second frequency, and a melting power supply circuit operatively supplying current to the coil means at said first frequency; characterised in that the melting power supply circuit includes series resonant means through which the melting power input component is applied to the coil means at the same time as the agitation power input component is applied thereto, each said supply circuit including means for regulating the input component respective thereto independently of and without affecting the other of the input components.

The agitation power input component may be single phase but is preferably multi-phase (conveniently 3-phase) and is also preferably at a lower frequency than the melting power input component.

The latter may be at a medium frequency of, for example, 150Hz upto 10Khz and more typically in the range 150-500Hz while the agitation power input component may typically be at 50Hz.

The melting power input component could be

single phase but is preferably also multi-phase and typically 3-phase or phase modified on the basis of 3-phase to provide a pulse frequency which is a multiple of the 3-phase input, each phase or phase grouping of each said input component being interconnected with each other to be applied to respective sections or windings of the induction coil means.

If said inputs are on a 3-phase basis the coil means is preferably composed of three windings connected in parallel but arranged so that the adjacent windings are contra wound with respect to each other so that there is zero voltage gradient across the gaps between the windings or sections of the induction coil means.

It is also preferred that the melting power supply circuit includes a variable induction power device, preferably line isolated or utilising a transformer for isolation from the circuitry of the induction coil means.

Some embodiments of the invention are now more particularly described with reference to the accompanying drawings wherein :-

Figure 1 is a diagram of one form of induction melting apparatus embodying the invention;

Figures 2 and 3 are diagrams of different modes of agitation or stirring which can be operatively induced in a melt;

Figure 4 is a diagram of a variable induction power device and series resonant capacitor means in a first form of melting power supply circuit;

Figure 5 is a diagram of another form of said circuit; and

Figure 6 is a diagram of a third form of said circuit intended for operation at a lower power level.

Referring firstly to Figures 1-3 induction melting apparatus includes a vessel 10 (not shown in Figure 1) for holding a melt 12 of molten metal e.g. in the preparation of alloys. Induction coil means 14 is associated with vessel 10 in known manner.

This example of the apparatus operates on 3-phase based power input to the coil means 14 and the latter is divided into three sections or windings 14a,b, c, which are connected to operate in parallel but with each winding contra-wound in the opposite direction to the immediately adjacent winding. Thus, for example, windings 14a and 14c would be wound clockwise and winding 14b, positioned between them, would be wound anticlockwise. This arrangement ensures that there is zero voltage gradient across the gaps or interfaces between the windings.

The apparatus further includes power supply means consisting of separately powered and regulated melting and agitation power supply circuits indicated generally at 16 and 18 respectively to the left and right of the coil means 14 in Figure 1.

The agitation power supply circuit 18 is generally of conventional construction. A 50Hz 3-phase power source is input at 20 through a phase rotation/reversal contactor device 22 and a motorised or manual off-load voltage tap changer switch 24 for voltage adjustment to an earth screened transformer device 26, the output therefrom having star connection 28 feeding the coil windings 14a, b, c, in parallel by direct connection thereto. Transformer device 26 further includes a tertiary 3-phase winding 27 feeding a 3-phase delta connected power factor correction capacitor arrangement 29.

Winding 27 could operate at nominally 1200v line voltage and capacitor arrangement 29 will be selected to supplement the power factor correction effect of series resonant tank capacitors in the melting power supply circuit 16 referred to hereafter.

The voltage control of transformer device 26 could be adapted to operate on-load e.g. by use of solid state variable inductors or a variable voltage transformer though the cost of such arrangement will be higher than the off-load control described above.

The application of the 3-phase agitation power input component to the induction coil means 14 will produce unidirectional stirring currents indicated diagrammatically at 30 in Figure 3 for agitation of the melt 12. The direction of flow of the stirring currents can be reversed by changing over the contactor device 22. Figure 3 shows one stirring or agitation mode but other modes or combination of modes are possible, Figure 2 illustrates diagrammatically the effect of single phase bi-directional stirring currents 31 for agitation of the melt 12 and that mode may be combined with the mode shown in Figure 3.

The melting power supply circuit 16 comprises a power input 32 from, in this example, a high voltage 3-phase 50Hz power source (the lines individual to each phase are not shown for clarity) feeding an earth screened 3-phase bridge rectifier device 34 with star/delta connections for phase splitting to provide 30 deg. phase shifting so that the frequency of the output therefrom is on a 12 pulse cycle. This output at medium frequency is fed to a variable induction power device 36, various forms of which will be described in greater detail hereafter and the output is split in parallel through three series resonant tank capacitors 38a,b,c, each connection to a respective induction coil winding 14a,b,c, to apply melting power input thereto. Thus medium frequency melting power is fed to the coil means 14 with simultaneous but separately controlled lower frequency agitation power, the series resonant capacitors 38 automatically block the agitation power input from affecting the variable input power device 36. Medium frequency melting power

input cannot affect the transformer device 26 as the secondary terminals of the latter are effectively in parallel at medium frequency.

The tank capacitors 38 are connected in star configuration, the "neutral" being the point of excitation at medium frequency.

Referring now to Figures 4, 5 and 6 various alternative forms of variable input power devices 36 are shown. Output from rectifier device 34 to which the 3-phase input supply is applied and which may be a bridge solid state rectifier provides a DC potential which is applied to a filter capacitor 40 of the variable induction power devices shown. Each said device also includes switching thyristors 48 which switch the DC voltage at medium frequency for application to the three coil windings 14a,b,c in parallel by way of the series resonant tank capacitors 38a,b,c in Figures 4 and 6.

In the cases of Figures 4 and 5 the variable induction power device is line isolated as shown in Figure 1 so that the input to the induction coil means 14 is in an electrically isolated from earth mode by means of the earth screening of devices 26 and 34.

In the case of Figure 4 the capacitors 38 in the connections to the coil windings act as auxiliary or additional blocking capacitors (at somewhat lower voltage) supplementing the action of tank capacitors 50 on the input side of the thyristors 48.

In Figure 5 the variable induction power device includes an alternative capacitor arrangement in the form of a three section tank capacitor 50 providing the series resonant effect.

In Figure 6 series resonant tank capacitors 38a,b,c associated with the coil windings are fed from a medium frequency isolation transformer 52 which is an economical form of isolation at lower power levels, say upto 500Kw, input to this transformer being provided from switching thyristors 48, 54 of the device 36.

The connections of coil windings 14 to the stirring power supply circuit 18 are not shown in Figures 4, 5 and 6 but will be as in Figure 1.

45 Claims

- 50 1. Induction melting apparatus including a vessel (10) for holding a melt (12) of molten metal, induction coil (14) means operatively associated with the vessel, and power supply means (16,18) for providing power input to the induction coil means, said input having a melting component at a first preselected frequency for operatively holding the melt at a preselected temperature by induction heating and an agitation component at a second preselected and different frequency for agitation of the melt by inducing turbulence therein; charac-

terised in that the power supply means comprises an agitation power supply circuit (18) operatively supplying current to the coil means at said second frequency, and a melting power supply circuit (16) including series resonant means (38) through which the melting component is operatively applied to the coil means at said first frequency at the same time as the agitation component is applied thereto, each said supply circuit including means (24,36) for regulating said component respective thereto independently of and without affecting the other of said components.

2. Apparatus as in Claim 1 characterised in that at least one of the power input components is multi-phase.

3. Apparatus as in Claim 2 characterised in that both the power input components are 3-phase.

4. Apparatus as in Claim 2 characterised in that the melting component is phase modified on the basis of 3-phase to provide a pulse frequency which is a multiple of the 3-phase input to the melting power supply circuit (16).

5. Apparatus as in Claim 4 characterised in that the induction coil means (14) includes a plurality of sections (14a,b,c) each having a respective phase or phase grouping of the components applied thereto.

6. Apparatus as in Claim 5 characterised in that said sections each comprise a winding (14a,b,c), adjacent windings of the coil being contra-wound with respect to each other whereby there is operatively zero voltage gradient across the gaps between said windings.

7. Apparatus as in any preceding claim characterised in that the agitation component is at a lower frequency than the melting power input component.

8. Apparatus as in any preceding claim characterised in that the melting power supply circuit (16) includes a variable induction power device (36).

9. Apparatus as in Claim 8 characterised in that said power device is isolated from circuitry of the induction coil means.

10. Apparatus as in any preceding claim characterised in that the series resonant means include tank capacitor means.

11. Apparatus as in Claim 10 characterised in that said tank capacitor means includes a plurality of tank capacitors (38a,b,c) connected in star configuration, the "neutral" being the point of excitation at a medium frequency.

12. Apparatus as in Claim 10 characterised by switching thyristors (48) each operatively switching medium frequency DC voltage for application to respective windings of the coil means (14) by way of respective series resonant tank capacitors (38) comprising said tank capacitor means.

13. Apparatus as in Claim 10 characterised in that the tank capacitor means comprises a multi-

section tank capacitor (50).

14. Apparatus as in Claim 10 characterised in that said tank capacitor means is fed from a medium frequency isolation transformer (52).

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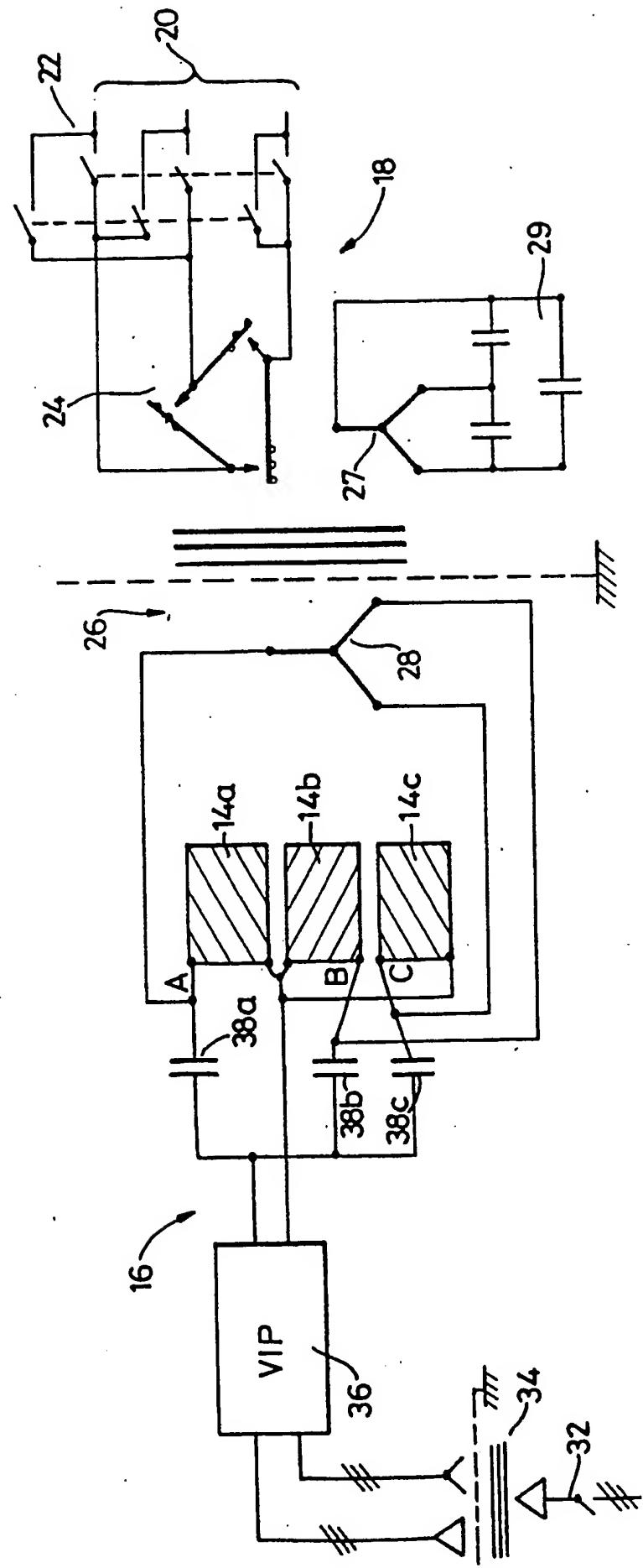


Fig. 1

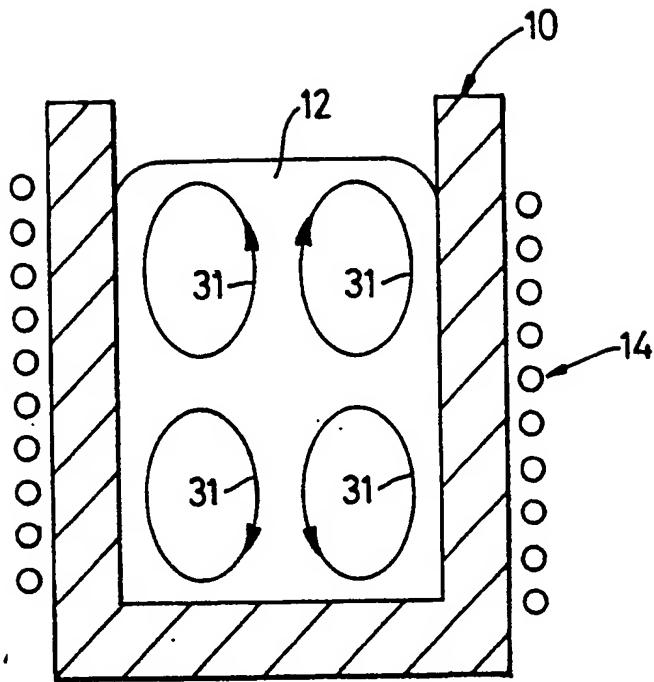


Fig. 2

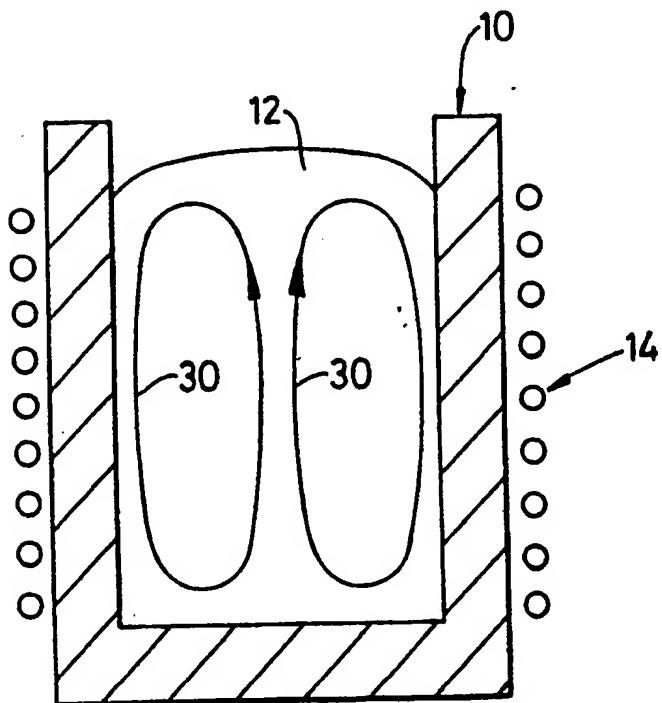


Fig. 3

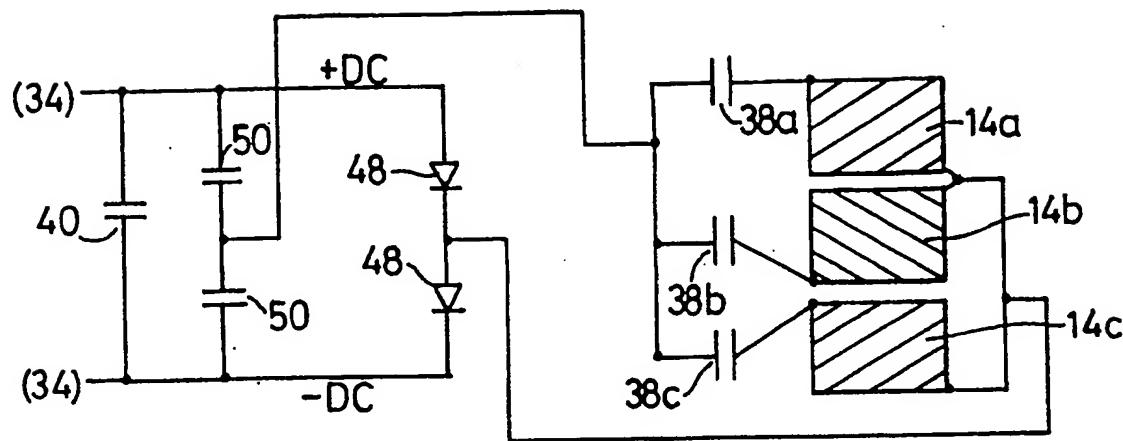


Fig. 4

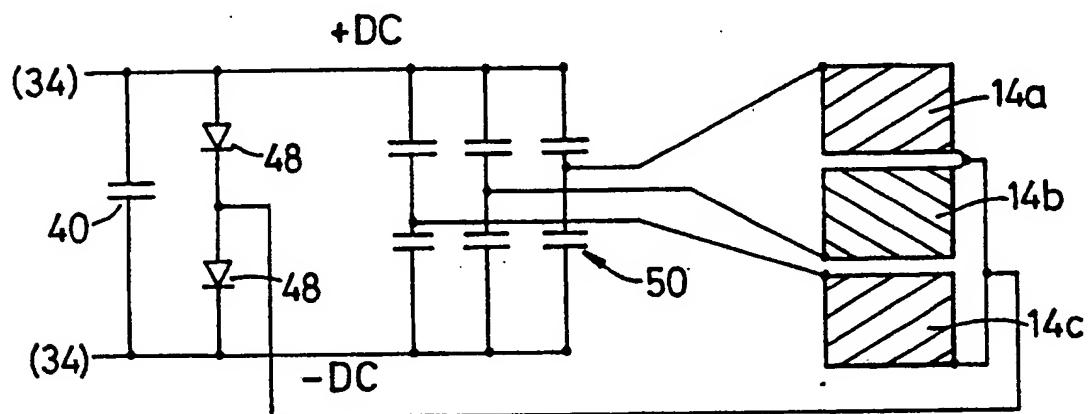


Fig. 5

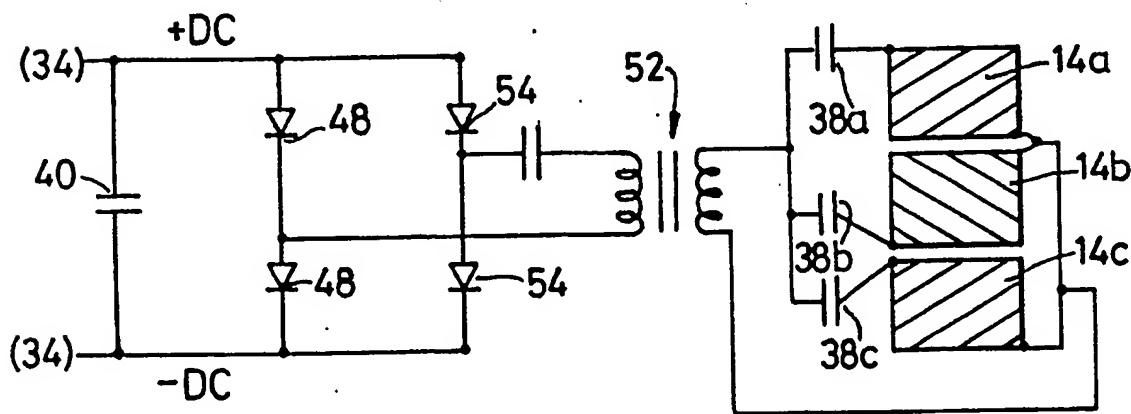


Fig. 6



EP 90306080.4

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.)
D, A	<u>GB - A - 2 200 979</u> (INDUCTOTHERM) * Abstract; fig. 1 * --	1	H 05 B 6/04 H 05 B 6/34 F 27 D 11/06
A	<u>FR - A1 - 2 399 180</u> (ELPHIAC) * Claims 1-3; fig. 1-3 * --	1, 2	
A	<u>GB - A - 508 255</u> (THE BRITISH THOMSON-HOUSTON) * Claim 1; fig. 2 * ----	1, 2	
TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.)			
F 27 D 11/00 H 05 B 6/00			
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search VIENNA	Date of completion of the search 28-09-1990	Examiner TSILIDIS	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS			
X : particularly relevant if taken alone	T : theory or principle underlying the invention		
Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category	E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date		
A : technological background	D : document cited in the application		
O : non-written disclosure	L : document cited for other reasons		
P : intermediate document	& : member of the same patent family, corresponding document		